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ABSTRACT

Coordinating boards, no matter how carefully constructed, are super bureaucracies. Battles inevitably ensue between a coordinating board and the institutions that it proports to coordinate. Strong coordinating boards work best in large industrialized states, states with populations running into the many millions and spending hundreds of millions of public tax dollars in higher education each year. A coordinating board does not seem to be the answer for the State of Nebraska. Compared to other states, its system of higher education is relatively simple and comprises a relatively small number of institutions. It seems that some form of state-wide governance would be the most efficient way to insure maximum utilization of the higher education tax dollar in Nebraska. (Author/KE)

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REFLECTIONS ON STATEWIDE COORDINATION

Remarks to the Nebraska Association of Colleges and Universities
Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska
December 6, 1974
by

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It is a great honor for me to have been asked to speak today to the Nebraska Association of Colleges and Universities. As most of you know I am very new to Nebraska, having arrived just this past July. Prior to my coming here I was Deputy Director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Since the purpose of our meeting today is to discuss coordination of postsecondary education in Nebraska, I thought I might spend a few minutes telling you about the Illinois system of higher education and the role of the Board of Higher Education within that system.

Just shortly before I left Illinois I was asked to give a speech at St. Louis University about the Illinois Board and its activities. I titled the speech "State-wide Coordination from the Perspective of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky." The reason I chose that title was because I had been struck by the great similarity between state-wide coordination of higher education and the Russian novel. In both instances there are many subplots and a cast of thousands of characters, all interwoven in an incredibly complex web. Then too, each exhibits great variations in tempo and emphasis, ranging from the boring and tedious to periods of furious action. Finally, I found it easy to make an identification between frustrated higher education coordinators on the one hand, and some of the principal characters in the Russian novel on the other -- such as Raskalnikov in Crime and Punishment, or Dmitri Karamazov, and of course, my favorite, Anna Karenina, especially at the moment she hurls herself under the train.

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The Illinois system of higher education is large and complex, and involves nearly 150 campuses of one sort or another. In the public sector there are over 70 public campuses, comprising four separate university systems and a community college system. The four university governing boards govern 12 separate academic campuses, five medical campuses and two dental campuses. The community college system comprises 48 community college campuses governed by 37 locally elected Boards of Trustees, and a state-wide community college coordinating board that reports in turn to the Board of Higher Education in the same manner as do the governing boards of the four university systems. In addition to these 70 public campuses there are roughly 80 private campuses of one kind or another, and over 500 proprietory schools. All together this system encompasses about 400,000 students in the public sector, about 120,000 students attending private colleges and universities, and about 500,000 students attending proprietory schools. Of course, these figures represent head count and not FTE.

The state tax dollar budget for higher education in Illinois is nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars. Of this amount, nearly 100 million dollars is expended each year for capital projects, about 400,000 million dollars for operating the public universities, and about 100,000 million dollars for community colleges (which is supplemented by roughly another 100 million dollars in local tax funds). Then there is about 60 million dollars spent through the Illinois scholarship commission, and most of this money goes to private colleges and universities. Finally, the State of Illinois expends nearly 20 million dollars in direct grants to private colleges and universities. To give you some feel for the magnitude of the operation, the University of Illinois receives a tax dollar base of nearly one-fifth of a billion dollars annually, excluding funds for capital projects.

Sitting astride (somewhat precariously) this large and complex system of

higher education is the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The Board comprises 16 members, of whom 10 are appointed by the Governor for overlapping six-year terms, four are appointed from the four university governing boards, one is appointed from the state community college board, and one, the state superintendent of public instruction, serves ex officio. The chairman of the Board of Higher Education is selected from among the gubernatorial appointees by the Governor and serves at the pleasure of the Governor. It is interesting to note that a majority of the members of the Board of Higher Education do not represent institutions.

The Board of Higher Education was formed in the early 60's as a result of constant bickering between Southern Illinois University and the University of Illinois. In a nutshell, the University of Illinois simply refused to recognize the upstart teachers colleges in Carbondale, while SIU refused to respect the historical hegemony of the "Big U" in Urbana.

The responsibilities of the Board of Higher Education are simple but far reaching: master planning, program review and approval, and budgetary review. In addition, the Board has recently been named the State's 1202 Commissioner by the Governor.

Master planning is the most direct power of the Board of Higher Education, although it happens that this power is a totally vacuous one unless backed up by the authority to review and approve programs and budgets. Since its inception in 1961, the Illinois Board of Higher Education has issued three master plans, each of which is referred to as a separate phase of a hypothetically single master plan. These plans have indeed had important ramifications in the development of Illinois higher education. For example, the state's community college system came about as a result of master planning and subsequent enforcement of that plan by the Board of Higher Education. Then too, the new universities have been formed as a result of planning. And as a result of the last phase of the master plan, a

Collegiate Common Market was established in Illinois under which cooperative programs between public, private, junior and senior institutions have been strongly encouraged.

The second power of the Board of Higher Education is the review and approval of all new units of instruction, research and public service. This is a very strong power in that the statute creating the Board provides for no appeal, even to the legislature, from Board decisions in the area of new programs. All types of programs are comprehended by this section of the statute, including new campuses, buildings, colleges, departments, institutes, centers, degree programs, majors, minors, public service programs, and research programs.

Many techniques and methods are used to review programs by the Board of Higher Education and its staff. First of all, the Board has established a list of standard criteria which is used as yardsticks to evaluate program proposals. These include such factors as societal need and student demand, quality of faculty and facilities, relationship to the master plan, assessment of the resources of the institution, and so forth. Most program review is carried out by the staff itself. However, on occasion, specialized consultants are brought in, particularly for the more esoteric professional programs. Then too, in the case of doctoral programs, the Board relies heavily upon advice from a Commission of Scholars comprising distinguished educators drawn from outside the State of Illinois.

The third power of the Board is review of institutional budget requests. In theory the Board simply makes recommendations on college and university budgets to the General Assembly and the Governor. However, as a practical matter, university and community college budgets pass through the Board of Higher Education. In the final analysis it has been the power of budgetary review that has proved most effective in implementing the master plan and enforcing the Board's decisions on new programs. I should add that in very recent years the budgetary process

has been an extremely painful one in Illinois, since new resources have been extremely limited.

The staff of the Board of Higher Education in Illinois has always been very small, particularly when compared to university system and community college system staffs. The total Board staff numbers under 50 persons, of whom roughly 20 are professional level employees. The staff is headed by an executive director, and under him are two deputy directors, one for academic affairs and one for fiscal affairs. Reporting to these three officers are roughly 13 program and budget staff at the doctoral or terminal degree level. The staff has tended to be eclectic in composition, having included over the years, historians, political scientists, lawyers, educationists, operations research people, public administrators, language majors and, of all things, one electrical engineer. The staff tends to be very tightly knit and very hard working.

However, we in Illinois, as in most state boards of higher education, suffered from an extremely high turnover. Most of our staff came from universities, and most wanted to return. Prior to my coming to the Board there had never been an academic deputy director in the history of the Board who had lasted more than a year. They weren't fired; they just quit. I think much of the reason for this high turnover was the fact that the Board of Higher Education had no constituency -- that is, nobody loved us. We didn't really work for the Governor's office, we didn't work for the Legislature, we didn't work for the universities, or for the students or for the faculty. We had no alumni, we had no flag, or handshake, or song, or football team. Survival depended upon our walking a very narrow and precarious tightrope among the huge power blocks that make up the Illinois educational and political establishment.

In theory at least, the Board of Higher Education is a coordinating board, not a governance unit; and I believe to a very great extent the theory worked in

practice. The Board has strong powers in certain limited, carefully prescribed areas, and maintains a small staff to implement these powers. The Board and its staff scrupulously avoid interferring in the hiring and firing of any faculty and administrators at the several institutions in the state. Moreover, we were not involved in determining campus educational policy, except to the extent that such policies bore upon the overall plans for higher education in the state. Then too, the disbursement and control of all funds is in the hands of the institutional governing boards, not under the Board of Higher Education. However, to say that the Board does not interfere in the internal management of the universities simply is not true. I believe it is impossible to give any kind of higher education coordinating board strong planning, program approval, and budgetary review powers without having that board become involved to some extent in the management of the universities and colleges.

But on balance the intent, and, I suppose, the effect, was to achieve maximum diversity and institutional autonomy within a rational framework of state-wide higher education policy. As a general rule, the Board of Higher Education asked the questions, raised the issues, set the agenda. But ultimately the institutions, subject to Board approval, provided the answers. Even this neat division of labor led on occasion to tensions and misunderstandings. I am reminded of the famous story attributed to Benjamin Franklin in which a French farmer shortly after the French Revolution felt he should begin to be more democratic with his farm animals. So he called all his chickens together in the barnyard and said to them, "Chickens, tell me, would you rather be fried or broiled?" And one brave young rooster in the back spoke up and said, "Please sir, we'd rather not be cooked at all." To which the farmer replied, somewhat angrily, "Rooster, please confine your remarks to the question at hand."

Now that I have told you something about the Illinois system of higher

education and the Board of Higher Education within that state, let me try to identify some of the issues that may be confronting Nebraska in this area of statewide coordination and planning. Let me say from the outset that being a newcomer, I don't presume to have sufficient knowledge of this state and its problems to know what's best for Nebraska. On the other hand, I think there are a set of common issues that confront every state which has considered the questions of coordination and governance of higher education.

The first question is: is any sort of coordination needed at all? In the case of Illinois there was gross competition between similar types of institutions -- competition that led to many fundamental educational questions being decided on a purely political basis. Then too, there was a great deal of program duplication within the state. In the final analysis I don't believe that coordination has reduced the state's expenditures in any area of higher education. But it has probably been very effective in cost avoidance -- that is, precluding the development of programs that would have cost the state a great deal of money had they been implemented.

The second big question, assuming Nebraska decides that coordination is needed, is the type or form of coordination that would be most effective here. One possibility is a very weak discussion board having no real statutory powers whatsoever. Such boards can be of some value in the exchange of information and, possibly even in building up good will among institutions. However, in a majority of cases these boards have little real value at all. Another option is to implement a strong coordinating board similar to the model adopted in Illinois. Here it is important to raise the question of the composition of such a board: should it have lay members only, or should professional educators be permitted as members? Then too, should the members of the board represent various institutions and sectors of higher education, or should all of the members, or at

least a majority of the members, be appointed as representatives only of the public interest?

Another model that might be adopted is a state-wide governing board. I believe the national trend in this area is toward state-wide governing boards. Thus, for example, I can think of two major states that have recently abandoned strong coordinating boards in favor of state-wide governing boards, but I can think of no states that have gone the other way. Finally, the fourth option is to place the problems of, and responsibility for, coordination in the hands of a legislative committee.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you some of my personal feelings relative to the question of state-wide coordination of higher education. First of all, let me say that I loved my work in Illinois a great deal, and I am very proud of the accomplishments of the Illinois Board and its staff. However, I would be less than candid if I did not say that the lack of a coordinating board in Nebraska was a major attraction for me when I was considering returning to a university. Coordinating boards, no matter how carefully constructed, are indeed super bureaucracies. Bitter battles inevitably ensue between a coordinating board and the institutions that it properts to coordinate, if for no other reason because the lines between planning and policy on the one hand and institutional management on the other are hard to define.

In my judgment strong coordinating boards work best in large industrialized states, states with populations running into the many millions and spending hundreds of millions of public tax dollars in higher education each year. I would have to say that, based on my experience in other states and what knowledge I have of higher education coordination throughout the country, I doubt that a coordinating board is the answer for the State of Nebraska. After all, Nebraska has only 1½ million people and spends less than one hundred million tax dollars

annually for all of higher education. Compared to other states, its system of higher education is relatively simple and comprises a relatively small number of institutions. Thus, on balance, and without in any way proclaiming myself an expert on the particular problems and potentials of Nebraska, I would think that some form of state-wide governance would be the most efficient way to insure maximum utilization of the higher education tax dollar in this State.